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Public Affairs Office
Fort Riley, KS 66442
Telephone (785) 239-3033/3410 FAX (785) 239-2592
After Hours (785) 239-2222
E-mail: stephanie.perrin@riley.army.mil or
skidmord@riley.army.mil
www.riley.army.mil

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT
Stephanie Perrin, Assistant Media Relations Officer (785) 239-3033

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CONFEREES STUDY WAYS TO KEEP MILITARY TRAINING AREAS HEALTHY

By Anna Morelock
Staff writer

From the roads, drivers traveling through Fort Riley's training areas see tall stretches of grass, stands of trees, wildflowers and streams.

The view seen through the lens of a digital camera mounted in the Integrated Training Area Management blimp shows a picture of the training areas that is not quite as pretty. Aerial photos show bare vehicle tracks crisscrossing range areas where tanks and "Humvees" have ripped up the vegetation with their tracks and tires during training exercises.

More than 500 participants, including contractors, Department of the Army civilians, commercial vendors and representatives from military installations in Canada, Great Britain, Germany and the United States, had the opportunity to view both scenes when they gathered at Kansas State University and Fort Riley Aug. 7-11 for the annual ITAM conference. Their purpose: to learn about issues such as the damage done to the training areas by military vehicles.

The conference teaches the best ways to sustain military training lands for use into the future, said Chris Otto from Fort Riley's ITAM program.

The conference, which is held near a different military installation each year, included sessions on several topics.

ITAM is made up of a couple of different components, Otto explained. Range and training land assessment is used to determine the condition of training lands.

Land rehabilitation and maintenance is fixing the damage caused by training. Sessions at K-State included specific topics such as geographical information systems and how to repair gulleys created by training.

"It's a good opportunity for ITAM people to exchange lessons learned, to highlight successes in different programs, share information and (to explain) techniques that are working well," Otto said.

During the field day at Fort Riley Aug. 10, participants spent the morning wandering around the training area, learning about the different studies going on at Fort Riley and about different techniques used to repair damage.

Under the shade of one tent, Paul Ayers from the University of Tennessee explained to a group of participants the purpose of the spiral tracks in the grass behind him.

Ayers has been working on the project at Fort Riley for about two years. The project tracks vehicles using global positioning systems during different training exercises.

The data collected from the maneuvering vehicles is then used to find out what site specific impact the vehicles have, Ayers said.

The information provided by the study will be useful in determining how much vegetation is removed during training exercises and how to best restore the damaged areas.

Participants also got to take a first-hand look at some training at Fort Riley. After the morning demonstrations, groups got an inside look at Soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, clearing buildings at the Combined Arms Collective Training Facility.

From behind Plexiglas doors, they watched as the Soldiers entered the building and searched each room, and then gathered outside to answer questions from the on-lookers.

Besides the training demonstration, participants toured the U.S. Cavalry Museum on Main Post, shot M-4 carbines on a firing range and tried out the tank simulators at the Close Combat Tactical Trainer.

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